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## THE SALES CYCLE

"Here, let me show you . . . do it this way."

"You just get on and ride, it's easy, really."

But as many of us recall from our childhood when learning to ride a bicycle it wasn't that easy in the beginning. And everyone seemed to have his or her opinions and ideas on how to do it.

First the initial, tentative, wobbly attempts with bruised shins, skinned knuckles and elbows; followed by more helpful suggestions from a father, brother or a friend; more practice; then finally it comes to the point where miraculously it all came together and you could just get on and ride.

And what do you know; at that point, it was easy.

What a sense of accomplishment . . . you finally did it! You now had joined that select group of kids that "know how to ride."

Yet all the talking about it, watching others do it, listening to suggestions on how operate the pedals, maintain the balance or steer were of no use whatsoever until you got on the bike and figured it out for yourself. Only then did it all make sense.

And once you did it, you never forgot how did you?

So it is with sales.

Everybody seems to have an opinion on it. You can read books on it, listen to experts, attend seminars, watch others, memorize rote scripts designed to "guarantee" a sale and still not be able to sell anything, for these all come from others opinions and ideas of how to do it. They may or may not work for you. Focusing solely on the mechanical aspects of selling may help you develop your technique, but won't do much for your mastery of the basic fundamentals.

You have to get on the "sales cycle" and ride to figure out how to maintain your "balance." You have to be able to think and talk at the same time. You have to "read" people accurately. You must be able to operate on instinct at a moment's notice. And the ability to be logical and emotional at the same time is indispensable.

No amount of planning will prepare you for the feeling of being in front of a live audience when you give your presentation.

For those people may very well respond in ways you haven't thought of. You can memorize and practice all the rote rules that are required to technically know how to sell according to some "authority" or expert, but that will usually leave you totally helpless when it comes to actually playing and winning the game of sales.

Most of sales' bibliography has sought to teach you how to find prospects and close deals by focusing solely on the technique necessary to accomplish this goal, seemingly the object or purpose of the profession.

Except it isn't . . .

Σ Technique is simply a requirement of the profession!

You can't remain in the profession long without satisfying those basic requirements that is certain, but there are other more basic elements to be absorbed as well. Providing you with these basics will allow you to understand the technology of the game of sales in addition to the technique thereby allowing you to correct and adjust your game as necessary.

The truth is, selling is largely a mental endeavor. Professionals estimate it to be at least 80 percent mental. It doesn't really require much physical strength or agility. But as with any game, you do require a certain level of intelligence and mental agility to win. While it is not exactly rocket science, there are fundamentals that are on the same order of magnitude as those found in the physical sciences.

## THE SALES CYCLE

As any experienced salesman will tell you, every sale goes through a nearly predictable series of steps, conceptually similar to every other sale.

Each one of these major steps has a definite recognizable point at which time it must be concluded expertly to avoid the risk of jeopardizing the entire effort. The sales process evolves and develops as it progresses or it fails. There is no middle ground. Every action you do either moves it forward or backward; it never just stays the same.

Additionally, time is generally your enemy as the longer it takes to move it though, the greater likelihood there is for some unforeseen element to appear and scuttle your efforts.

Therefore, it might be of great value to know exactly where you are in the game, and what step you are on so you can plan your actions for greatest efficiency and effectiveness in bringing the sales cycle to a successful completion.

First, let's agree upon a basic concept for the activity in which we are involved.

The act of selling could be defined in two parts as follows:

1. A human activity consisting of a defined series of steps designed to facilitate the smooth and willing exchange of something of value for something that is wanted or needed.
2. By the use of effective communication, to forward the accomplishment of the particular purposes of the individuals involved for their separate and mutual benefit.

Technically it is a word that denotes a series of actions beginning with locating, contacting and qualifying a prospect and ending with closing a transaction wherein money or its equivalent is received in exchange for services, goods or property.

It should be apparent that selling is not a static, motionless activity. It involves action and interaction; it means causing things to happen proactively, not just waiting for something to come to you; actively engaging another person with communication to discover what they need and want that you can help them achieve

The sales cycle then, is simply a term I have coined to describe the complete process of the sale, from the very beginning through to the close, that would include the accomplishment of all the steps as mentioned above.

These steps are actually essentially composed of a series of targets, which must be fully completed before moving on to the next. Each of these targets or sub-products has a defined purpose, as well as a beginning, middle and an ending. Knowledge of each of these elements will enable one to estimate where he is in the overall cycle and to either repair the one he is on, or move on to the next one.

In this series of articles, we will examine not only the overall and its purpose, but also each of the individual steps comprising the vital ingredients of the formula necessary to bring any sales effort to a successful conclusion. If you as a professional sales person have this knowledge and experience of every aspect of this cycle, and a willingness to control all elements involved, you will find yourself able to take a high degree of responsibility for the outcome.

You'll discover you can almost predict how it is going to turn out, resulting in a dramatic increase in your capability, confidence and competence in the area. In this first article, we will focus on the isolation of the single most important part of the overall process, the subject of purposes.

## PURPOSE WITH PURPOSE

Volumes have been written about finding and satisfying the purposes of the prospect, but have largely overlooked the single biggest reason for failure of the salesman.

The most important step in any sales process occurs before any contact is made between the salesman and the customer.

Σ The vital first step is to establish the goals and purposes of the salesperson!

This concept is largely either unknown or ignored. Yet, it seems ridiculously obvious once identified doesn't it?

Unless the salesman has identified his own clearly defined purposes for what he is trying to do, as well as confidence in his ability to achieve them, he will flounder. Further, unless he knows how to handle his failures as well as his successes regarding his purposes, he will create his own problems and make his work much harder than it should be.

I think you'll find the subject of purposes an interesting and powerful subject especially when dealing with your own.

To begin, let's differentiate what we're talking about from the sea of information that already exists on this subject.

In discussing purposes, I'm not suggesting that "thinking the right thoughts creates all success" as the cognitive psychologists and all too many motivational speakers do. Nor am I saying that all your success is dependent only upon your actions, or the things you do, as those of the behavior modification persuasion preach. I'm not even telling you that your future prosperity is based upon some spiritual alignment of your past experience as we hear from the metaphysical believers.

All I'm indicating is simply this:

Σ That if you set up a wrong purpose, you can only achieve a wrong result.

Σ Unless you recognize when you have achieved your intended purpose and bring it to a close, you can create problems that didn't previously exist.

Σ By failing to properly handle your success, you can bring about your own eventual failure.

So, let's look at this thing called a purpose and see how we can use it to our advantage.

A purpose is simply something that sets a direction and dictates action toward the accomplishment of something we want to acquire or have, do, or become.

Now in selling, if you set up a purpose that involves only your well-being and not that of the other person, you'll have problems. This would be like selling someone on the idea that they should give you money only because you need it. Now, perhaps that worked on our parents when we were kids to further our ends, but in the adult world, others are not often so generous. Others expect and demand to be given something in return for their money and in fact become upset when they feel they are shortchanged. They have their own purposes to be satisfied.

Clearly unless your purpose in selling includes the other person in the equation, at some point you will begin to have difficulties. The prospect or customer will begin to resent that his needs and wants are being neglected, as you are only focusing on your own.

It shouldn't take too much effort to consider what the customer would conceive of as an ideal selling cycle. Certainly he might imagine that he would get something that satisfies what he needs and wants, at a price consistent with its perceived value, and a not-unpleasant interaction with the salesman. Doesn't seem that difficult does it? But as the salesperson, we have to ensure that this concept contains something consistent with your own purposes? If it is, then we're on the right track.

If not, then get used to having problems convincing them that they should do business with you only because "you need the money," because that is rarely going to be their purpose.

Also, beware of setting up a purpose like, "to see a lot of people," or, "make a good presentation." Yes, these are requirements of success in the profession, but they come under the heading of techniques. These are ways that you accomplish your purpose, not the purpose in itself.

Your purpose must, of necessity, include a benefit for the customer, as well as for you, in its statement. Refer to the concept of selling as stated above. It must be something that will mutually

benefit both parties in a willing exchange. It must be something that would be of help or assistance to the person and not only to you. Time spent working this out for yourself would be well spent. And I don't want to rob you of whatever epiphany that would result, but to get the ball rolling, I'll give you a couple of examples of what I'm talking about both correct and incorrect purposes.

Examples:

Correct purposes:

Σ To create a selling environment whereby the customer ends up comfortably telling me what is creating pain or difficulty in his business; has aligned my product, service or solution to help him solve that problem; and willingly moves forward into a contractual agreement with me.

Σ A client that is confident in the fact that I now understand his problems, that my solution will benefit him in moving toward a solution, and does engage my services.

Σ A signed contract, with all parties in good communication, confident that their mutual and individual benefit will be served.

Almost any wording of your purpose will work, as long as it takes into consideration that you're trying to help give the client what he wants at a price that makes it profitable for you. Note that though money is implied, it has not been specifically stated as a purpose.

Incorrect purposes:

Σ To get the customer to pay me as much as possible now.

Σ To find out how much the client has to spend and get him to give it to me.

Σ To get prospects' money in my pocket.

To clarify; it is perfectly all right to receive money as a fair exchange for a product or service or solution. Business is after all supposed to be a remunerative activity and if it is not, you won't be in business for long.

But if you set up a purpose only to get money, you will create problems for yourself, as other individuals you're dealing with don't generally agree this purpose. They won't help you achieve your purpose; in fact they will tend to resist unless you are seeking charity or donations. Even then, unless you acknowledge their interest and purpose in giving you money, you'll have trouble.

Whatever you sell or produce, or whatever service you give in return for money, should be a service or object that is needed and wanted. If you have a purpose and that purpose also supplies a demand then if you work on it, you should be rewarded for your time.

For example, if you are a salesman, first you must believe in your product. You must know that it is needed and wanted and that your purpose is to sell that product. The wrong way to go about it is to say, "I'm going to make \$1000 today." That will not get the best results. But if you were to say, "I am going to sell this account today," your attention would be on the right purpose and you are looking at the correct area to do some good selling.

If you have your attention only on money and are thinking in terms of money you tend to direct the prospects attention into the area of money also. But if you had your attention on selling the product and helping them with their goals, their attention would tend to follow yours.

Conversely, the salesman, who is totally motivated by money, almost has dollar signs flashing in his eyes, and no matter how good his product is, if the customer feels he is "being sold," he will tend to manifest that thing called, "sales resistance" that is written about so extensively. You can avoid this problem and get the customer to assist you when your attention is on him and his purposes, not exclusively on what you will gain from the exchange.

This is so true that you'll sometimes find yourself in the middle of a sales procedure with all the buying

signals present, and the minute you take your attention off the purposes to help the prospect and begin thinking about how much commission you're going to make, the client will inexplicably begin to bring up concerns and considerations about money. You'll have created problems that didn't exist.

Yes, I know you'll now begin to use all those carefully learned "closing techniques" to handle his considerations and of course you should. Perhaps you'll even be successful. But the point I'm trying to make is that the problem that you are now required to handle may not have existed prior to you putting your attention only on what you will get out of the sale. You made it harder than it might have been otherwise.

Often, it is only necessary to recognize your error and correct it swiftly by directing your attention and communication back to his purposes, his goals, what he will gain from the sale. He will often drop the money consideration because his attention will now be back on what benefit he will get from the exchange.

The salesman who believes in his product and has his attention on his product will make the customer feel good about the product. So, if you are in the selling field especially, get a purpose for selling, other than solely money. If you can't see how your product helps people, get another product to sell.

Clarifying your own purposes will provide focus and direction to your selling efforts and eliminate much wasted effort and energy.

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